Be sun smart

For more information about sun safety and the ozone layer, contact:

Washington Department of Health
Toll free 1-888-586-9427

Stratospheric Ozone Hotline
Environmental Protection Agency
Toll free 1-800-296-1996

Washington State Department of Health
Office of Environmental Health and Safety
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It's summertime – a great time to enjoy the beautiful mountains, beaches and lakes. But when you are out in the sun, be sun smart. One reason why sun safety has become more important: ozone depletion. Follow the guidelines for sun safety and have a fun and healthy summer!

Who Should Be Concerned About Sun Safety?

Everyone. People who are most at risk for health problems are those who spend a lot of time working or playing in direct sunlight. In addition, small children, the elderly and disabled may need special care to protect them from the harmful effects of the sun.

Why Is Sun Safety Important Now?

Sunburns, heat exhaustion and sun stroke are common problems caused by too much sun. Recent studies, however, show a link between overexposure to the sun and serious health problems that may take years to develop. Too much sun is connected with certain types of skin cancer and eye problems, such as cataracts. The sun's UV (ultraviolet) radiation can also weaken the body's immune system, making it harder to fight off illness and infection. Too much sun now may cause health problems later.

How Can I Be "Sun Smart?"

There are simple things that you can do to protect yourself and your family. These four easy-to-remember steps are called the ABC's of sun safety:

Away. Stay away from the sun in the middle of the day.
Block. Use sun block with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or more.
Cover up. Wear a shirt, a hat and sunglasses.
Speak out. Ask your family and friends to be sun smart too.

Away. Sunshine is most intense during the summer and at midday. Schedule outdoor activities before 11 am or after 3 pm daylight savings time (before 10 am and after 2 pm standard time). Keep track of the time you spend in the sun. Some people with light skin get sunburns after only 15 minutes in the midday summer sun. Dark skin pigmentation does not protect you against UV radiation.

Block. Spread sun lotion evenly over your skin. Don't forget your ears, nose and lips. Use lotions with a sun protection factor of 15 or higher. Put the lotion on about 30 minutes before going out in the sun. Apply it again after swimming or sweating a lot. For the best protection, look for sun blocks that screen out both UVA and UVB rays. Don't use sun block lotion as an excuse to stay out too long in the sun.

Cover up. Wear a hat and light colored clothing outdoors. Hats with full brims, like Panama hats or cowboy hats, provide the best protection. Tightly woven fabrics reflect heat better than looser weaves and can help keep you cool. Sunglasses must have a UV filter to help protect your eyes. Look for sunglasses that have a filter capacity of 400 nanometers printed on the label.

Speak out. Talk to family members, friends, coaches, camp counselors and scout leaders about the ABC's of sun protection. Urge officials to plant trees and provide shaded areas at playgrounds and school yards. Help others protect themselves from sun damage. Remember... the idea that a tan is healthy is wrong. Tanning is a sign of sun damage.

How Does the Ozone Layer Affect Sun Exposure?

The ozone layer in the earth's upper atmosphere shields us from the sun's harmful UV radiation. Studies show that the ozone layer is getting thinner. This means that more of the sun's harmful rays are reaching us. The decrease in the ozone layer is most dramatic over Antarctica. There has been a three to five percent decrease in ozone over North America, Europe and northern Asia during the past ten years.

What Is Causing the Ozone Layer to Get Thinner?

Ozone in the upper atmosphere constantly breaks down and forms again. But because of chemicals called CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons), the ozone layer is breaking down faster than it can replenish itself. One CFC molecule can destroy as many as 100,000 molecules of ozone. CFCs are made for use in refrigerators and air conditioners. Certain types of insulation and foam rubber also contain CFCs.

Is There an Ozone Layer Problem in Washington State?

The problem is worldwide. People who work or play outdoors during the summer are at higher risk to exposure from UV light. In the summer, the sun's rays are more nearly vertical to the surface of the earth. Therefore, the concentration of UV light reaching the earth's surface is greater in the summer.

What Can I Do to Help Save the Ozone Layer?

It is very important that we stop releasing CFCs into the air. You can help by making sure that the products you buy do not contain CFCs. Ask if foam insulation, furniture padding or packing materials contain CFCs. Choose only those businesses which are trained and certified in CFC recovery to service your refrigerator, freezer or automobile air conditioner.

To be sun smart, follow the ABC's of sun safety. Make sure that anyone in your care, young or old, follows them too.

Protect Yourself!

Be Sun Smart!

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